

best example at the hearings was the decision that the poor soldier has to make about whether to take his veterans benefits or his DOD benefits and how difficult that decision is, and how some of them are just driven crazy about how you arrive at that decision, since the amounts can be very different, the kind of decision where you need somebody holding your hand all the time.

My colleague talked about poor judgment from the beginning when we went to the invasion and now when we see soldiers coming back home. I indicated earlier that a colossal example of poor judgment was closing the premier military hospital in the middle of a war.

If I could just quote in closing from Vice Chair Cody, who testified before us at the Oversight and Reform Committee hearing: "You are trying to get the best people to come here to work, and they know in 3 years that this place will close down and they are not sure whether they will be afforded the opportunity to move to the new Walter Reed National Military Center. That causes some issues."

Well, as I have said, we are not going to give \$3 billion for bricks and mortar in the middle of a war anyway, so that is why I am introducing a bill tomorrow just to send the signal that we are not going to close this hospital.

Mr. AL GREEN of Texas. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentlelady for her vision as well.

Let me close by saying this to my colleagues and friends: we are not talking about what we call a Third World country when we talk about Walter Reed and the facilities. We are talking about the richest country in the world, a country where we can spend \$177 million per day on the war, and that was prior to January of this year. Now we spend over \$200 million, not per year, not per month, not per week, but per day on the war. A country where one out of every 110 persons is a millionaire.

In this, the richest country in the world, where our soldiers and our veterans have made it possible for us to have these riches, these liberties, I think that we have to provide better services for them before, during, and after any injury that they may receive.

So I am honored that we had the time tonight. I want to thank the Speaker for allowing us to have this time tonight.

Mr. CONYERS. Mr. Speaker, I want to thank Congressmen AL GREEN and FRANK PALLONE for arranging this Special Order hour. Today I rise to register my concern about the conditions at Walter Reed Army Medical Center and to show my support and dedication to increasing the quality of health care services, for our veterans as well as our men and women in uniform.

The Nation has been horrified by the Washington Post's recent reports of the appalling conditions at Walter Reed Army Medical Center. Thanks to the diligent investigative reporting of Dana Priest and Anne Hull, we now know that our soldiers recovering in outpatient

units are being forced to confront cockroaches, mice droppings and toxic black mold as they heal. Even worse, many become lost in an uncaring military bureaucracy that subjects them to long waits just to get their most basic needs addressed.

The administration is now scrambling to control the damage from this scathing exposé of its neglect of our wounded warriors. Almost as distressing as the conditions at Walter Reed is the fact that it took a report from the Washington Post to get the administration to address this unacceptable situation. We now know that our wounded warriors have been complaining about these problems for years, not just at Walter Reed but at military hospitals and outpatient facilities across the country. Their pleas, however, seem to have fallen on deaf ears. We owe a debt of gratitude to the reporters and editors at the Washington Post for uncovering this abominable situation and forcing this administration to act.

Time and again, when those of us who oppose America's involvement in Iraq stand up and question why our brave men and women in uniform must fight and die in a war of choice, we are accused of "not supporting the troops." But, Madam Speaker, supporting the troops is about more than lip service. The hypocrisy and irony of the situation at Walter Reed is scandalous and immoral. The same administration that hides behind the troops to avoid changing its policy in Iraq is guilty of abandoning the very men and women who must make the sacrifices required to carry out this failed policy.

The sheer audacity of the administration's rhetoric in comparison with its actions is staggering. The administration trumpets its support for the troops but then, in the next moment, sends them into battle without the proper training and equipment. The administration says it supports the troops, but then falls short in providing them with a safe environment to heal the wounds they received while fighting so valiantly and selflessly for our country.

Thousands of our brave men and women serving the administration's failed policy in Iraq have paid a heavy price. Since March of 2003, 23,677 service members have been wounded in Iraq. Our military and VA health care systems are in crisis, apparently unprepared for the influx of casualties that war unavoidably creates. These health systems have been overwhelmed by troops returning from battle seeking health care and, in many instances, are unable to provide these men and women with the services they so desperately need. It is estimated that in the coming years over 700,000 veterans from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan will enter the military and veterans health care system. Yet, because of Republican budget cuts, many of our brave soldiers are returning home with mental health ailments to discover that they will receive a third fewer psychiatric visits than they would have just 10 years ago.

The number of soldiers navigating the bureaucracy of Walter Reed since 2001 has nearly doubled, yet the administration continues to move forward with the planned closing of the hospital. The president's budget continues to shortchange veterans' health care, providing an increase in fiscal year 2008 but then cutting the budget in fiscal years 2009 and 2010 to below the 2008 level and freezing the funding level thereafter. The administration's lack of planning for the war

seems to include a total disregard for the service members who are returning home bearing the scars of the conflict.

Mr. Speaker, our soldiers have done their duty. Now we must truly support them, not by blindly continuing a failed policy, but by getting them out of harm's way. We will continue to insist that our service members receive the health care they deserve. We will continue to hold oversight hearings about the conditions faced by our wounded service members and veterans at Walter Reed as well as at other military and veterans health facilities across the country. But the best way to support these brave young men and women is to begin a fully-funded withdrawal. Let's really support our troops by giving them the equipment and supplies they need to get out of Iraq safely in the next 6 months.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. AL GREEN of Texas. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members have 5 legislative days to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material on the subject of my Special Order earlier tonight.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. BOREN). Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Texas?

There was no objection.

CONGRESSIONAL IMMIGRATION CAUCUS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 18, 2007, the gentleman from California (Mr. BILBRAY) is recognized for 60 minutes.

Mr. BILBRAY. Mr. Speaker, welcome to the chair. I hope you enjoy your duration up there, as many years ago, it must have been 1995, I had the privilege of my first time in the chair. I hope you enjoy it as much, and I hope everybody at home is watching you in your day of glory.

Mr. Speaker, I yield to the gentleman from Iowa.

Mr. KING of Iowa. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman from California for yielding.

I feel compelled to respond to many of the remarks that have been made here on the floor about the condition of the health care treatment for our veterans. I won't deny that there were unacceptable conditions in Building 18. I don't believe there has been any empirical data or quantifiable information that says it has gone beyond some of the rooms within Building 18.

But I know when I go out to Walter Reed and when I go to Bethesda and when I go to Landstuhl and I look those people in the eye that are there every day with compassion fatigue that are giving their heart and soul and everything they have for the health care interests of our brave soldiers who have been wounded defending our freedom, a lot of that freedom and a lot of that mission have been opposed by the people on this side of the aisle, there is a strong commitment in all of those